

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

The listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A method for charging a subscriber for
airtime, the method comprising:
 - determining a first reference billing rate for a first category of airtime;
 - determining a first threshold airtime amount for the first category of
airtime;
 - determining a quantity of first category airtime consumed by the
subscriber;
 - determining a first discounted billing rate for the first category of airtime
that is less than the first reference rate based on a function that at least one of
rewards customer loyalty and encourages subscription to higher cost subscription
plans; and,
 - charging the first discounted billing rate for at least some first category
airtime consumed by the subscriber in excess of the first threshold airtime amount.
2. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising:
 - charging the first reference rate for an amount of first category airtime
consumed by the subscriber up to the first threshold airtime amount.
3. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising:
 - charging a flat fee for first category airtime consumed by the subscriber
up to the first threshold airtime amount.
4. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising:
 - determining a second threshold airtime amount, greater than the first
threshold airtime amount; determining a second discounted billing rate for the first
category of airtime that is less than the first discounted rate; and
 - charging the second discounted billing rate for at least some first
category airtime consumed by the subscriber in excess of the second threshold
airtime amount.

5. (Original) The method of claim 4 further comprising:
determining a third threshold airtime amount, greater than the second threshold airtime amount;
determining a third discounted billing rate for the first category of airtime that is less than the second discounted rate; and
charging the third discounted billing rate for at least some first category airtime consumed by the subscriber in excess of the third threshold airtime amount.

6. (Original) The method of claim 5 further comprising:
determining a fourth threshold airtime amount, greater than the third threshold airtime amount;
determining a fourth discounted billing rate for the first category of airtime that is less than the third discounted rate; and,
charging the fourth discounted billing rate for at least some first category airtime consumed by the subscriber in excess of the fourth threshold airtime amount.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising:
determining a second reference billing rate for a second category of airtime;
determining a second category first threshold airtime amount;
determining a quantity of second category airtime consumed by the subscriber;
determining a second category first discounted billing rate for the second category of airtime less than the second reference rate;
charging the second category first discounted billing rate for at least some second category airtime consumed by the subscriber in excess of the second category first threshold airtime amount.

8. (Original) The method of claim 7 further comprising:
charging the second reference rate for second category airtime consumed by the subscriber up to the second category first threshold airtime amount.

9. (Original) The method of claim 7 further comprising:
charging a flat fee for second category airtime consumed by the subscriber up to the second category first threshold airtime amount.

10. (Original) The method of claim 7 further comprising
determining a second category second threshold airtime amount, greater than the second category first threshold airtime amount;
determining a second category second discounted billing rate for the second category of airtime that is less than the second category first discounted rate;
and
charging the second category second discounted billing rate for at least some second category airtime consumed by the subscriber in excess of the second category second threshold airtime amount.

11. (Original) The method of claim 10 further comprising
determining a second category third threshold airtime amount, greater than the second category second threshold airtime amount;
determining a second category third discounted billing rate for the second category of airtime that is less than the second category second discounted rate; and
charging the second category third discounted billing rate for at least some second category airtime consumed by the subscriber in excess of the second category third threshold airtime amount.

12. (Original) The method of claim 11 further comprising:
determining a second category fourth threshold airtime amount, greater than the second category third threshold airtime amount;
determining a second category fourth discounted billing rate for the second category of airtime that is less than the second category third discounted rate; and
charging the second category fourth discounted billing rate for at least some second category airtime consumed by the subscriber in excess of the second category fourth threshold airtime amount.

13. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein determining a first discounted billing rate for the first category of airtime that is less than the first reference rate comprises:

determining a time period the subscriber has been a customer; and,
determining the first discounted billing rate based on a function of the time period the subscriber has been a customer that generates a larger discount for longer customer time periods.

14. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein determining a first discounted billing rate for the first category of airtime that is less than the first reference rate comprises:

determining a calling plan subscription cost of the subscriber; and,
determining the first discounted billing rate based on a function of the calling plan subscription cost of the subscriber that generates a larger discounts for higher cost subscription plans.

15. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein determining a first discounted billing rate for the first category of airtime that is less than the first reference rate comprises:

determining a time period the subscriber has been a customer;
determining a calling plan subscription cost of the subscriber; and,
determining the first discounted billing rate based on a function of the time period the subscriber has been a customer and of the calling plan subscription cost of the subscriber that generates larger discounts for longer customer time periods and higher cost subscription plans.

16. (Currently Amended) A method for charging a subscriber for airtime, the method comprising:

associating one or more reference billing rates with a respective one or more airtime categories in a calling plan;

determining one or more respective discounted billing strategies for charging for airtime consumed by the subscriber in excess of one or more calling plan limits associated with a calling plan of the subscriber wherein the one or more

discounted billing strategies is based on a function that at least one of rewards customer loyalty and encourages subscription to higher cost subscription plans;

determining one or more airtime amounts in the one or more airtime categories consumed by the subscriber in an airtime billing period;

applying one of, the one or more reference billing rates and a flat fee, for respective portions of the one or more airtime amounts that are within the one or more calling plan limit to determine basic charges;

applying the one or more discounted billing strategies to portions of the one or more airtime amounts that are in excess of the calling plan to determine discounted surcharges; and

combining the basic charges and discounted surcharges to determine a total charge for the subscriber for the billing period.

17. (Original) The method of claim 16 wherein determining one or more respective discounted billing strategies comprises:

selecting one or more airtime consumption thresholds for each of the one or more air time categories; and,

calculating one or more discounted billing rate associated with the one or more airtime consumption thresholds based on a function of at least one of a time period the subscriber has been a customer, a calling plan subscription cost of the subscriber and the amount of airtime consumed in one or more airtime categories during a period of interest, the function selected to generate larger discounts for at least one of longer customer time periods, higher cost subscription plans and the amount of airtime consumed in the one or more airtime categories.

18. (Original) The method of claim 16 wherein determining one or more respective discounted billing strategies comprises:

calculating one or more discounted billing rates based on a function of at least one of a time period the subscriber has been a customer and a calling plan subscription cost of the subscriber, and the amount of airtime consumed in one or more airtime categories during a period of interest, the function selected to generate larger discounts for at least one of longer customer time periods and higher cost subscription plans, and the amount of airtime consumed in the one or more airtime categories during the period of interest.

19. (Original) The method of claim 16 wherein determining one or more
airtime amounts comprises:

processing call detail records generated by calls associated with the
subscriber during the billing period.

20. (Currently Amended) A system for charging a subscriber for
airtime, the ~~method~~ system comprising:

means for determining a first reference billing rate for a first category of
airtime;

means for determining a first threshold airtime amount;

means for determining a quantity of first category airtime consumed by
the subscriber;

means for determining a first discounted billing rate for the first
category of airtime that is less than the first reference rate wherein the first
discounted billing rate is based on a function that at least one of rewards customer
loyalty and encourages subscription to higher cost subscription plans; and,

means for charging the first discounted billing rate for at least some
first category airtime consumed by the subscriber in excess of the first threshold
airtime amount.

21. (Original) The system of claim 20 further comprising:

means for charging the first reference rate for an amount of first
category airtime consumed by the subscriber up to the first threshold airtime amount.

22. (Original) The system of claim 20 further comprising:

means for charging a flat fee for first category airtime consumed by the
subscriber up to the first threshold airtime amount.

23. (Original) The system of claim 20 further comprising: means for
determining a second threshold airtime amount, greater than the first threshold
airtime amount;

means for determining a second discounted billing rate for the first category of airtime that is less than the first discounted rate; and

means for charging the second discounted billing rate for at least some first category airtime consumed by the subscriber in excess of the second threshold airtime amount.

24. (Original) The system of claim 23 further comprising:

means for determining a third threshold airtime amount, greater than the second threshold airtime amount;

means for determining a third discounted billing rate for the first category of airtime that is less than the second discounted rate; and

means for charging the third discounted billing rate for at least some first category airtime consumed by the subscriber in excess of the third threshold airtime amount.

25. (Original) The system of claim 24 further comprising:

means for determining a fourth threshold airtime amount, greater than the third threshold airtime amount;

means for determining a fourth discounted billing rate for the first category of airtime that is less than the third discounted rate; and

means for charging the fourth discounted billing rate for at least some first category airtime consumed by the subscriber in excess of the fourth threshold airtime amount.

26. (Original) The system of claim 20 further comprising:

means for determining a second reference billing rate for a second category of airtime;

means for determining a second category first threshold airtime amount;

means for determining a quantity of second category airtime consumed by the subscriber;

means for determining a second category first discounted billing rate for the second category of airtime less than the second reference rate; and,

means for charging the second category first discounted billing rate for at least some second category airtime consumed by the subscriber in excess of the second category first threshold airtime amount.

27. (Original) The system of claim 26 further comprising:
means for charging the second reference rate for second category airtime consumed by the subscriber up to the second category first threshold airtime amount.

28. (Original) The system of claim 26 further comprising:
means for charging a flat fee for second category airtime consumed by the subscriber up to the second category first threshold airtime amount.

29. (Original) The system of claim 26 further comprising:
means for determining a second category second threshold airtime amount, greater than the second category first threshold airtime amount;
means for determining a second category second discounted billing rate for the second category of airtime that is less than the second category first discounted rate; and
means for charging the second category second discounted billing rate for at least some second category airtime consumed by the subscriber in excess of the second category second threshold airtime amount.

30. (Original) The system of claim 29 further comprising:
means for determining a second category third threshold airtime amount, greater than the second category second threshold airtime amount;
means for determining a second category third discounted billing rate for the second category of airtime that is less than the second category second discounted rate; and
means for charging the second category third discounted billing rate for at least some second category airtime consumed by the subscriber in excess of the second category third threshold airtime amount.

31. (Original) The system of claim 30 further comprising:
means for determining a second category fourth threshold
airtime amount, greater than the second category third threshold airtime amount;
means for determining a second category fourth discounted billing rate
for the second category of airtime that is less than the second category third
discounted rate; and
means for charging the second category fourth discounted billing rate
for at least some second category airtime consumed by the subscriber in excess of
the second category fourth threshold airtime amount.

32. (Original) The system of claim 20 wherein the means for
determining a first discounted billing rate for the first category of airtime that is less
than the first reference rate comprises:
means for determining a time period the subscriber has been a
customer; and,
means for determining the first discounted billing rate based on a
function of the time period the subscriber has been a customer that generates a
larger discounts for longer customer time periods.

33. (Original) The system of claim 20 wherein the means for
determining a first discounted billing rate for the first category of airtime that is less
than the first reference rate comprises:
means for determining a calling plan subscription cost of the
subscriber; and
means for determining the first discounted billing rate based on a
function of the calling plan subscription cost of the subscriber that generates a larger
discount for higher cost subscription plans.

34. (Original) The system of claim 20 wherein the means for
determining a first discounted billing rate for the first category of airtime that is less
than the first reference rate comprises:
means for determining a time period the subscriber has been a
customer;

means for determining a calling plan subscription cost of the subscriber; and,

means for determining the first discounted billing rate based on a function of the time period the subscriber has been a customer and of the calling plan subscription cost of the subscriber that generates larger discounts for longer customer time periods and higher cost subscription plans.

35. (Currently Amended) A system operative to charge a progressively lower rate for airtime consumed by a subscriber during a billing period, the system comprising:

a call record reviewer operative to determine one or more total quantities of airtime consumed in one or more airtime categories during the billing period; and,

~~an~~ a graduated biller operative to apply one or more charges for portions of the one or more total quantities of airtime that are below one or more threshold quantities and to apply at least one discounted billing rate to one or more portions of the one or more total quantities of airtime that are above the one or more threshold quantities of airtime wherein the at least one discounted billing rate is determined from a function that at least one of rewards customer loyalty and encourages subscription to higher cost subscription plans.

36. (Original) The system of claim 35 wherein the graduated biller is operative to apply a flat rate charge for portions of the one or more total quantities of airtime that are below one or more calling plan limits.

37. (Original) The system of claim 35 wherein the graduated biller is operative to apply a charge based on one or more reference billing rates for portions of the one or more total quantities of airtime that are below one or more calling plan limits.

38. (Original) The system of claim 35 wherein the graduated biller is operative to apply at least one discounted billing rate, relative to at least one reference billing rate associated with portions of the one or more total quantities of

airtime that are below one or more calling plan limits, to portions of the one or more total quantities of airtime that are above one or more calling plan limits.

39. (Original) The system of claim 35 wherein the graduated biller is operative to apply a first discounted billing rate to a portion of a total quantity of a consumed airtime in a first airtime category above a first airtime category first threshold quantity and below a first airtime category second quantity threshold.

40. (Original) The system of claim 39 wherein the graduated biller is operative to apply a second discounted billing rate to a portion of a total quantity of a consumed airtime in a first airtime category above the first airtime category second threshold quantity and below a first airtime category third threshold quantity.

41. (Original) The system of claim 35 wherein the graduated biller is operative to apply a continuously increasingly discounted billing rate to a portion of a total quantity of a consumed airtime in a first airtime category above a first airtime category threshold quantity.

42. (Original) The system of claim 35 wherein the graduated biller is operative to apply a first discounted billing rate based a function of the time period the subscriber has been a customer that generates a larger discounts for longer customer time periods.

43. (Original) The system of claim 35 wherein the graduated biller is operative to apply a first discounted billing rate based on a function of the calling plan subscription cost of the subscriber that generates a larger discount for higher cost subscription plans.

44. (Original) The system of claim 35 wherein the graduated biller is operative to apply a first discounted billing rate based on a function of the time period the subscriber has been a customer and of the calling plan subscription cost of the subscriber that generates larger discounts for longer customer time periods and higher cost subscription plans.

45. (Currently Amended) The system of claim ~~36~~41 wherein the continuously increasingly discounted billing rate is a function of the time period the subscriber has been a customer that generates a larger discounts for longer customer time periods and the amount of airtime consumed in a first airtime category.

46. (Currently Amended) The system of claim ~~35~~41 wherein the continuously increasingly discounted billing rate is a function of the calling plan subscription cost of the subscriber that generates a larger ~~discounts~~discount for higher cost subscription plans and ~~the amount~~larger amounts of airtime consumed in a first airtime category.

47. (Currently Amended) The system of claim ~~35~~41 wherein the continuously increasingly discounted billing rate is a function of the time period the subscriber has been a customer, the calling plan subscription cost of the subscriber that generates a larger discount for longer customer time periods, and higher cost subscription plans and ~~the amount~~larger amounts of airtime consumed in a first airtime category.